

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Protecting rare bogs means protecting their water flow

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

“You’re not going to find any if you don’t stick your hand in,” was the instruction. We were searching for bog turtles, the smallest turtle in North America and one that’s federally protected.

To find a bog turtle, you dip a long stick into the muck and mud of a bog bottom, hoping to tap the shell of the tiny animals, which measure only about four inches –long. When you feel the tap, you roll up your sleeves and dip your hand into the muck, usually finding that the tap was a buried tree branch, hoping it isn’t a snapping turtle, and if you’re lucky, pulling up a rare bog turtle.

Both of the bogs we visited that day were a lot drier than when North Carolina biologists had visited them earlier in the year. The bogs these little turtles depend on are very sensitive to changes in water flow. Not only are they affected by the obvious events like drought, but water flow can be altered when a new parking lot is constructed, preventing water from soaking into the soil and becoming groundwater that may feed into a bog; or by the construction of a new road bed, which can alter surface water flow. Protecting bog turtles means not only protecting the animals themselves, not only protecting the bogs, but also ensuring the flow of water that’s fundamental to the existence of a bog and so easily impacted.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.